

Side Brown

Ten years after his death, Bob Marley will be remembered tonight at Irvine Auditorium with a concert featuring his wife, Rita Marley, his band, The Wailers, Marcia Griffiths, a member of the I-Threes, who sang behind him, as well as Andrew Tosh and the Maccabee Band.

Rita Marley, an important artist in her own right, returned to performing earlier this year and released her first album in eight years, the very strong *We Must Carry On* (Shanachie).

The Wailers (now called The Wailers Band) just released a new album *Majestic Warriors* (Tabu/A&M) that crosses their direct brand of reggae with modern pop production. Now led by the great guitarist, Junior Marvin, who sings lead and writes much of the material, it would be impossible for the Wailers to have generated the fire that Marley -- a true natural force -- did. Still, his spirit is evident on many songs including "Out of Exile" and "Nothin' For Nothin'."

The Wailers have taken advantage of the advances in recording technology in addition to being influenced by various trends in music from pop to African, and like the Neville Brothers, have arrived at a new, at times slicker sound that might not be what you expect or want, but at the very least deserves a chance. A couple of listens to "My Friend," "Showdown" or "Bad Mind People" should be all it takes to realize this band is still among the best of reggae.

Another singer who worked closely with Marley, Judy Mowatt plays the Chestnut
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Cabaret next Wednesday with Sly Dunbar and Robbie Shakespeare. Mowatt's new album *Look At Love* (Shanachie) goes a long way towards reestablishing the connection between reggae and American R and B and soul. Produced by Sly and Robbie with Michael "Home T" Bennett, the music is down to earth but adventurous.

Mowatt's vocals are alive with expression on Marley's "Jah Live," "Guilty," and especially the superb "Fly African Eagle." While some reggae is often weighted down in a smoky dirgy haze, Mowatt's voice always suggests light and hope, even on the heaviest songs. While this album has a couple of weak moments, they are quickly forgotten on songs like the traditional "Never Get Weary," UB40's "Watchdogs," and "Day by Day."

Squeeze who are at the Tower Saturday, have a new album, *Play* (Reprise) that's fairly mellow but nonetheless enjoyable. This is a group where the songs and the craft that Chris Difford and Glenn Tillbrook put into their songwriting stands out more than anything even though Tillbrook's vocals are both haunting and haunted, and their harmonies are exceptional. Instrumentally, they're inventive, but with the exception of a couple of hot guitar solos here and there, they're tasteful, but not particularly exciting.

Play has two songs which hit me every time I hear them, "Cupid's Toy," which has a great chorus: "This boy doesn't give love/This boy doesn't get love" and "Walk a Straight Line," which has a beautiful McCartneyesque melody, and is backed by light drums, acoustic guitar and accordion and features a rather heavenly slide guitar solo that almost
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sounds like a pedal steel.

Other good songs include "The Truth," "Gone to the Dogs," "Sunday Street" and "Wicked and Cruel" that display Difford and Tillbrook's considerable songwriting skill, particularly when it comes to placing weird descriptive lyrics around very catchy choruses, but in terms of real emotion those two songs are the ones that really make it.

Replacing Kirsty MacColl on the bill are a new band from England The Candy Skins who just released their debut Space I'm In (DGC). They're sort of (and being hyped as) a jangly guitar pop band, but lead singer Nick Cope has an edge in his voice that many similar bands lack, and that edge often extends to the music as well, particularly on the hard rocking, opening cut "I'm Easy." They also boast more than decent songwriting and an occasionally punky attitude which is reflected in the sarcastic whining harmonies on "Sad to See You Go."

More important, they sound and play like a band, and this debut is remarkably free of over production and obvious commercial excess, and the only time they use effects is on a quite good cover of Buffalo Springfield's "For What It's Worth" that uses a continuous tape-loop sample of the opening drums and screech of "Sympathy For the Devil." I'm no great supporter of sampling, but this is one case where it works effectively as something new.

Also on the bill are the Katydids, making this a triple British bill. Their latest album Shangri-la (Reprise) features tightly written, well executed, sometimes trendy, often poetic
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pop songs that would be a lot better if lead singer and lyricist Susie Hug would learn to get loose.

Also on Saturday, (mostly local guys) Nixon's Head make a rare appearance at Khyber Pass in celebration of their new 45. "The New World Over"/"What We Lack." Both

songs are tough gritty rockers with the guitars louder and funkier than their previous recordings, and as usual, totally on-the-mark drumming by Seth Baer as well as solid bass work by Mike Frank. It's enough to make you wish they'd play more than a couple of times a year. Also on the bill are two of the best local bands, Sir Dot and Red Burns and the Tequila Worms.

Though he's been playing and recording (mostly as a side-man) since the '40s, Snooky Pryor who appears in concert Saturday at the Commodore Barry Club, (Carpenter Lane and Emlen Street in West Mount Airy) has been largely and unjustifiably overlooked in the various blues revivals. This started to change in 1989 with Snooky on the Blind Pig label, and his new album To Cool to Move on Antone's, which is one label that knows how to make blues records sound like blues records should take him even further.

In his 70s, Pryor is an astoundingly powerful singer and an even more impressive harp player with a style strongly influenced by Sonny Boy Williamson II. Virtually every song on the record kicks ass, with Pryor ably backed by such Chicago greats as pianist, Pinetop

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Perkins, guitarist Luther Tucker, bassist Calvin Jones, and drummer Willie Smith -- all of whom worked with Muddy Waters among many others. Other tracks feature guitarist, Duke Robillard, (now with the Fabulous Thunderbirds) and the exceptional Austin guitarist Derek O'Brien who co-produced the album with Pryor, as well as the legendary drummer George Rains.

The songs are all Pryor originals with the exception of the standard "Bottle Up and Go," but each one does what the blues is supposed to do -- take you up and out.

Pryor will also make an "in-store" appearance at 5 p.m. performing solo at Third Street Jazz, and opening the concert which starts at 8:30 p.m. is the great local blues group Steve Guyger and the Excellos who are always worth seeing. (For more information, call the Philadelphia Blues Machine at 849-5465.)